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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of a specialized after-school program, the Services to Youth Program (STYP), as one method of preventing the reoccurrence of criminal activity among delinquent youth. Seven African American youth who actively participated in the structured, curriculum-based after-school program were compared with a matched group of seven non-participating youth. The groups were matched for age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, grade level, type of offense, and number of adults in the household. The program met daily after school and on Saturdays for 3 hours each day for a 9-month period with a curriculum focused on causes and processes related to destructive behavior and strategies to prevent, reverse, and/or ameliorate these behaviors. Three instruments were administered at intake and at program termination: (1) the Criminal Behavior Assessment/Reassessment of Risk (a cognitive outcome measure); (2) Profile of High School Students (a cognitive outcome measure); and (3) Program Evaluation Form (an affective outcome measure). At termination, three of STYP participants had reoffended (two misdemeanors and one felony) compared with the nonparticipating youth who had all reoffended with felonies. Findings also suggested STYP participants had improved behavioral self-control and expressed increased satisfaction with the STYP program over time. (DB)

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ED 432 862

Can Specialized After-School Programs Impact Delinquent Behavior Among African American Youth?

Introduction

African American youth increasingly are committing juvenile offenses. There is a preponderance of African American youth between the ages of 13 and 17 that regularly enter our juvenile justice system. This behavior burdens both parents and society with economic and social costs. These costs are reflected in employee absenteeism as parents have to attend court hearings, decreased productivity of workers as their caseloads reach uncontrollable levels, overcrowded jails and detention centers as more and more youth are detained, and an increase in merchandise costs as a result of shoplifting and theft. Given the prevalence of juvenile crime, it is important to develop valid, feasible, prevention-type programs to address the seriousness of juvenile crime.

This summary describes a study examining the impact of a specialized after-school program, the Services to Youth Program (STYP), as one method for decreasing juvenile crime among school-age youth. Using both a cognitive and affective framework, the overall goal of the STYP was to prevent the reoccurrence of criminal activity among delinquent youth. Cognitive goals included: (1) to understand how personal behavior impacts responses from others; (2) to learn new methods for improving negative behaviors; and (3) to learn positive techniques and strategies for addressing personal needs, while avoiding negative behaviors. Affective goals included: (1) to give appropriate expression of personal emotions; (2) to engage in meaningful interaction with peers and others; and (3) to become aware of the personal and social effects of negative behaviors.

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Methods

Participants

Respondents ($N = 14$) were referred by a juvenile court probation officer or judge and were (a) between 13 - 17 years of age; (b) currently enrolled in school; (c) had written parental or guardian consent to participate in the program; and (d) had committed in writing to participate in the program. Dismissal from the program resulted when a youth (a) demonstrated habitual disregard for program rules and regulations; (b) was permanently expelled from school; and/or (c) used alcohol or other drugs while in the program or on program grounds. Group I consisted of 7 African American youth who actively participated in a structured, curriculum-based after-school program. Group II was a matched group of 7 youth who did not participate in the program and who were not involved in any structured activities or after-school programming.

The two groups were matched according to age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, grade level, type of offense, and number of adults in the household. All participants were required to provide written parental/guardian consent for their participation in the STYP. Youths with chronic substance abuse problems were not accepted into the program.

Curriculum-Based Design

Group I met daily after school and on Saturdays (6 days per week total) for 3 hours each day for a 9-month period. Participants progressed through a theoretically-based, four stage curriculum. The curriculum was culturally sensitive and dealt with theory and description relevant to causes and processes related to destructive behavior, and the strategies to prevent, reverse, and/or ameliorate these behaviors (see Table 1). This emphasis was designed to help the youth develop empathy and understanding for themselves by examining their "social identities" in relation to social dominance and social subordinance. Content was based upon one's self-image in relation to social position and negative stereotyping. Through specialized and focused groups, youth, and their families, were challenged to self-actualize, to reclaim the strengths and values of the extended family, and to develop stronger family systems in which parents have well-defined roles and maintain leadership and authority. Participants in Group I progressed through each level based upon personal accomplishments, completion of tasks, and self-awareness. Each youth within this group was monitored and supervised by program staff as he/she matriculated through the levels.

Group II was a control group and consisted of 7 youth who did not participate in any structured activities or after-school programming. Risk Assessment was a standardized measurement tool used by the Division of Youth Services designed to measure level of criminal risk at each stage of the program.

Data Collection

Three instruments[1] were administered at intake and at program termination (i.e., nine months): (1) **Criminal Behavior Assessment/ Reassessment of Risk** (Cognitive Outcome Measure). This is a two-part, easily scored risk assessment measurement for use with juvenile delinquents. Part I identifies an individual's delinquent history and socialization practices. Part II records program impact, socialization practices, and youth self-reporting behaviors. The assessment includes quarterly reviews (at conclusion of month 3, 6 and 9) of court records, probation officer reports, and court service worker records on each

[1]The three instruments described in this summary may be obtained by contacting the author.

Table 1
Services to Youth Program Curriculum

Levels	Goals	Objectives/Strategies	Theoretical Orientation
I - Entry/Assessment Phase	1. Orientation 2. Evaluation/ Assessment 3. Goal-Setting 4. Relationship Building 5. Risk Assessment	1. Intake Summary Report & Psychological Status Report 2. Ropes Course 3. Life Skills & Socialization 4. Anger Management 5. Risk Assessment Tool	1. Behavior Modification 2. Social Learning Theory
II a - Primary Problem Solving II b - Intermediate Problem Solving	1. Self-Awareness/ Reflection 2. Academic Enrichment *Interaction/Didactic Strategies* 3. Problem-Solving & Coping Mechanisms 4. Risk Assessment	1. Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention Groups 2. Reality Therapy 3. Rites of Passage Program 4. Tutorials 5. Computer Classes 6. Male & Female Parenting Groups 7. Risk Assessment Revisited	1. Operant Conditioning 2. Social Cognitive Theory 3. Race, Class, and Oppression
III a - Advanced Problem Solving III b - Skill Building Intervention/Problem-Solving	1. Responsiveness 2. Targeting Behaviors 1. Addiction Disorders 2. Social Deviant Behaviors 3. Parent/Child Communications and Relationship Building 4. Community Awareness 5. Job Readiness Skills 6. Risk Assessment	1. A & D Groups (12-step) 2. Family & Individual Counseling 3. Community Networking & Resource Building 4. Sex Offenders Group 5. Community Service 6. Risk Assessment Revisited	1. Behavior Modification 2. Social Learning Theory
IV - Termination	1. Maintenance 2. Life Skills Preparation 3. Risk Assessment	1. Post Assessment *and* Evaluation (Summary, Termination, Discharge) 2. Job Skills & Placement 3. Mentoring Program 4. Support Groups	Reinforcement and Support

participant to determine the number and type of criminal offenses committed by youth during program evaluation. This instrument was developed by the Division of Children and Youth Services, Atlanta, Georgia; (2) **Profile of High School Students** (Cognitive Outcome Measure), a 20-item self-report instrument that measures three variables– aggressive behavior, self-discipline, and social control. Social control measures were used for the current study; and (3) **Program Evaluation Form** (Affective Outcome Measure), a 30-item scale that measures program satisfaction, program participation, and youth awareness of personal behavior. This instrument was developed by the author specifically for use with STYP.

Results

Demographics

The study population consisted of 14 respondents (29% females, n =4; 71% males, n= 10) whose mean age was 14.3. All respondents were African American. The mean level of education was 8th grade. Forty-three percent of the population attended public schools and 57% of the population attended alternative schools. Fourteen percent of the respondents lived with two parent families. 43% of the youth lived in single parent households and the remaining 43% lived in group homes. The average family income was $16,250.

Clinical assessments of program participants revealed that 43% of the study population met the criteria for a DSM-IV diagnosis of conduct disorder; 43% adjustment disorder; 14% oppositional disorder; and 14% attention deficit disorder. Two participants received a dual diagnosis.

Criminal Behavior Assessment

The type of offenses committed by the youth at intake were misdemeanor (57%; defined as shoplifting, truancy, ungovernable behavior) and felony (43%; defined as armed robbery, murder, drug trafficking, auto theft, and assault). At termination, 43% (n= 3) of the Group I study population reoffended. Reoffenses include arrests, charges and convictions. These 3 reoffenses included 2 misdemeanors and 1 felony. Fifty-seven percent (n= 4) of this group did not reoffend while actively engaged in the program (see Table 2). At termination of the program, 100% of the youth in Group II had committed felonies, an increase from 43% at intake, while only

Table 2
Comparison of Group I and Group II Offenses

Group I Offenses				Group II Offenses			
Youth #	At Intake	During Program[2]	At Termination[2]	Youth #	At Intake	During Program	At Termination
1	Misdemeanor[3]	-	-	1	Misdemeanor	Felony	Felony
2	Misdemeanor	-	-	2	Misdemeanor	Felony	Felony
3	Misdemeanor	-	Misdemeanor	3	Misdemeanor	Felony	Felony
4	Felony	-	-	4	Felony	Felony	Felony
5	Felony	-	Misdemeanor	5	Felony	Felony	Felony
6[1]	Felony	Misdemeanor	-	6	Felony	Felony	Felony
7	Misdemeanor	-	Felony[4]	7	Misdemeanor	Felony	Felony

[1] Youth was offense free for 3 months, committed a misdemeanor in the 2nd quarter, and remained offense free for the remainder of the program.
[2] During Program refers to quarterly evaluations of youth participatn in the STYP at the conclusion of month 3, 6, and 9. Termination was at 9 months.
[3] Misdemeanor = shoplifting, truancy, ungovernable behavior, violation of parole, runaway, reckless conduct
[4] Felony = armed robbery, murder, drug trafficking, auto theft, theft by receiving stolen property, assault, stalking, rape

14% of Group I had committed a felony, a decrease from 43% at intake.

Profile of High School Students (PHHS)

Youth within the STYP appeared to demonstrate more behavioral self-control than those youth who did not participate in the program. All youth came into the program with scores reflecting limited behavioral self-control. However at termination, Group I scores suggested improved behavioral self-control when compared to Group II, those youth who had no program intervention. See Figure 1.

Program Evaluation Form (PEF)

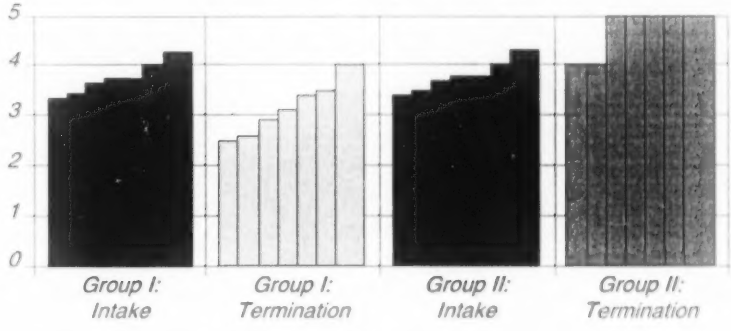
Youth who participated in the STYP indicated increasing satisfaction with the program's specialized intervention. Upon entry into the program, these youth expressed a low-to-moderate level of satisfaction with the STYP; however, during the third quarter upon termination, these same youth expressed moderate-to-high levels of satisfaction with the program (see Figure 2).

Conclusions

This study indicates that specialized, curriculum-based programs appear to modulate the frequency of serious offenses among African American youth. Without specialized intervention, delinquent behavior among this study group appeared to escalate into more serious crimes against others. The study also appears to indicate that structure and sustained behavioral self-control have a positive effect on retarding delinquent behavior among African American youth. If this is the case, it is essential that policy makers, educators, parents, and members of the juvenile justice system who work with this population employ deliberate and standardized measures to ensure that delinquent youth benefit from this type of programming.

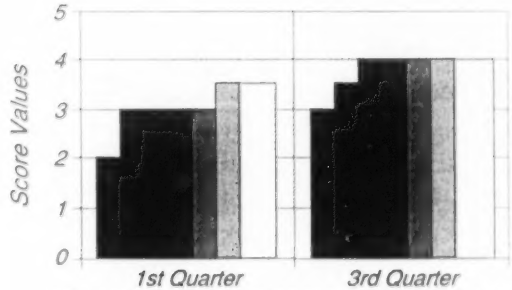
This model provides insight into juvenile prevention. Further studies validating the above findings are needed, as is research on other programs applicable to juvenile prevention. One of the essential purposes of this study was to examine how specialized, after-school programs impact delinquent behavior among African American youth. Future studies should compare STYP results against non curriculum-based programs or other program methods where such success is achieved.

Figure 1
Profile of High School Students:
Individual Self-Control Ratings* by Program Time



*Scores range from 1 = strong self control to 5 = no self control.

Figure 2
First and Third Quarter Program Evaluation Scores* by Program Participants



* Scores range from 1 = Dissatisfied to 5 = Extremely Satisfied

Although imperfect, the STYP does provide professionals and parents with insight into prevention and a standard format that can enhance the likelihood that juvenile delinquent behavior can be controlled or modified through strategic planning and monitoring of youth. For the present, it would appear that the STYP could be used as one prototype by parents, social workers, juvenile justice personnel, and other professionals for working with delinquent African American youth.